

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 15 June 2005 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.25 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

Members Present:

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): B Sandler (Chairman), R Morgan and
Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): R Glozier and M Heavens

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): T Spencer, M Tomkins and G McEwen

Representing Local Councils:

J Salter (Abbess, Beauchamp & Berners Roding PC), Mrs P Smith (Epping Upland PC), Councillor Roger Pearce (Loughton TC), Councillor Ed Borton (Nazeing PC), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing PC), Derek Farr (North Weald Bassett PC), N Wilkinson (Roydon PC), Councillor Heather Nicholas (Roydon PC), Councillor R Russell (Stapleford Abbots PC), Councillor John Farren (Stapleford Abbots PC), Councillor J E Dolder (High Ongar PC), Councillor T A Taylor (High Ongar PC), Councillor L R Norman (Matching PC), Councillor Richard Clay (Theydon Garnon PC), Councillor David Cole (Theydon Mount PC), D R Chapman (Chigwell PC) and Councillor T Everett (Chigwell PC)

Apologies: Epping Forest District Council –

Councillor(s): Mrs A Haigh

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): E Webster

Parish/Town Councils: -

C Thompson (Moreton, Bobbingworth & the Lavers PC), Councillor Mrs J Woods (Loughton TC) and Councillor R Woods (North Weald Bassett Parish Council)

Officers Present:

J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), P Blamey (Parking Manager), J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), S Solon (Principal Planning Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

By Invitation: S Graysmark (Harlow Police)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

(a) District Councillor Brian Sandler was confirmed as the Chairman of the Committee for the Civic Year.

(b) Parish Councillor J Salter was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the Civic Year.

2. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 February 2005 be confirmed as a correct record.

3. POLICE Q&A SESSION.

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Superintendent Steve Graysmark of the Harlow Police who was standing in for Chief Superintendent Coltman who, due to other commitments could not attend. The Chairman explained that Superintendent Graysmark was there at the invitation of the Committee to engage in a question and answer session on Policing issues for the District. In his opening statement Superintendent Graysmark informed the meeting that a new Chief Superintendent would be starting soon, a Mr Andy Evans, who has a very good reputation.

Q: People are encountering a lot of difficulties in contracting the Local Community Team in Chigwell, and are not even getting call backs from messages that they leave, can you help?

A: if you give me your details afterwards, I will look into that. We have a very good team in Chigwell, doing excellent work in the area.

Q: Theydon Bois has installed a CCTV system recently and get regular requests to download them to disks, but the Police are reluctant to pick them up and so we are left with a stack of DVD's. We have also installed a broadband connection to link up the CCTV feed with the Police, where they can download the images at the Police Station in Ongar.

A: They should off course pick them up; and I will have to research into the capabilities they have in receiving and storing you CCTV footage via a broadband connection.

Q: We have heard that Community Officers are to be put into vehicles for patrols, but we would like them to continue to patrol on foot.

A: I can assure you that Community Officers will stay on foot. Although they do use buses and tubes to get them to their patrol area, they will not use cars to get them around their patrol areas.

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) added that this is a large rural district with little public transport in places. They cannot use Police vehicles but we are discussing the use of smart cars to get them to their patrol areas, we are also exploring the use of Community Transport Busses to move them around.

Q: There are a lot of cars parking on pavements, I have raised this with the police but they say it is of a low priority.

A: It is a low priority, we can have a blitz on people who do this but an area will need to be identified and then prioritised. I will take your details at the end of the meeting.

Q: What is the current situation in the North and West part of the district over resources; and can officers stay in one location over a long period of time so that they can build up some expertise and local knowledge?

A: I agree that it's better for officers to stay in one place for a long time, but I can't stop people moving especially if they want to progress their careers.

It used to be that Epping and Harlow were on different communication channels so Harlow could miss calls (even if they are closer) so someone from Epping would have to respond. A call now goes out on both channels.

There are never enough police officers, the Met. takes a lot of staff, but despite this, our detection rate is going up. We target 'hot spots' which helps and also do work with prolific offenders, and have recently targeted the top 23, offenders trying to change their behaviour.

We try to target our officers more efficiently, although we would like more police officers, central office says that we have more officers now than we have ever had.

Q: Regarding the enforcements of speed limits, just how do we get mobile speed cameras sent to our areas.

A: The traffic police are the people to ask. There has to be some sort of criteria on their allocation, every village wants a camera but we can only put them in priority areas.

The Head of Environmental Services commented that the district has a speed camera partnership and will try to establish what the criteria are and make it available with the minutes of this meeting. Paul Hardy can come to the next meeting to answer any questions that may arise.

Q: It is alleged that there is a lot of crime committed by travellers and that the police are reluctant to go and search their sites – is this true?

A: We do respond but need a large force to do this - before we go into a traveller's camp we need to do a risk assessment.

Q: Are there still opportunities for civilian observers to go on patrol with officers?

A: There is no reason why we cannot do this. This is mostly done for young people who are looking to join us, but we can do this for local councillors etc.

Q: We had a presentation about anti social behaviour at Theydon Bois, by the British Transport Police, who said that they worked in close liaison with the police. Can you elaborate?

A: Yes we are developing a good partnership with them. We recently had a joint operation at Debden College, which was very successful. We have also done something similar at Harlow College.

We are upbeat about the future as we have a new Chief Constable who is meant to be very good and had raised the detection rate in his old division by over 30%. It is tough to get crime down in this area, but we will get there.

At this point the Chairman brought this section of the meeting to a close, thanking Superintendent Graysmark for his valued contribution in answering the questions raised.

4. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

a) Planning Enforcement

The meeting received a report from Stephan Solon (Senior Planning Officer) who currently manages the Planning Enforcement Team. The district council currently has 4½ enforcement officers and 1 administrative person, with only himself with any planning experience.

There were over 700 cases cleared per year over the last few years, with a backlog of about 580 cases still to be closed. They are currently looking into ways to eat into this backlog – by looking at officer's caseloads to see if they can close any cases and to review any particularly difficult cases. Last year 890 new cases were received – with the review currently going on it is hoped that a substantial number of these cases will be dealt with. Although it is recognised that there are staffing issues, having one post that they have not been able to fill. They particularly need officers with planning experience.

A member noted that without more staff it seemed difficult to see how the section could catch up with the backlog; they need more money to get more staff. The parishes tend to see planning issues that are on the whole, ignored.

Another member noted that planning sub committees ran a serious risk when they imposed conditions that needed to be enforced, but with the backlog they cannot enforce it. The planning officer replied that officers advise members if conditions are enforceable to which members need to listen to and act upon.

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) added that Planning Enforcement is discretionary, which meant the council does not have to do it, but does it anyway in the interests of good planning for the district. There are more jobs than officers available to fill them. The Government says this service should be cost neutral but the council are unable to achieve this. There is a dilemma here as members are reluctant to raise more money through the Council Tax as the government may cap us.

A member asked if a report is made by one of the parishes on an enforcement matter would the Enforcement Team give this priority over a public complaint? The planning officer answered they prioritise on the nature of the complaint and not on who sends it in. He added that they would also like more information from the parishes when they do send in reports.

The planning officer was asked what would happen to the backlog – will it ever get cleared? He answered that it depended on the nature of the complaints, the easy ones could be cleared in a few weeks, but some of the more difficult cases could take years – one thing they do need is more officers with planning expertise.

b) Highways Maintenance

The Head of Environmental Services gave a short account of the latest position on the transfer of highways to the County Council and drew the attention of the meeting to the tabled sheet containing the new contact names and numbers of the Highways section (Appendix 1). He offered to ask Paul Hardy, the West Essex Area Manager for Highways and Transportation to attend the next meeting to answer any questions. The majority of the highways officers are the same ones who did this work for the District Council and so there would be no learning curve for them. A formal service agreement is still to be signed with ECC. If the parishes have any problems contacting Paul Hardy or his team please contact Environmental Services at Epping Forest DC and they will endeavour to help.

There is a Highways Transportation Panel being set up to liaise with Essex C.C, and this should be set up by September this year. Also starting up will be an EFDC Overview and Scrutiny Panel that would be taking a particular interest in this move.

c) Parking Attendants

The Head of Environmental Services introduced Paul Blamey, the Council Parking Manager. He explained that yellow lines first appeared in 1958, this used to be controlled by the Police, then by traffic wardens and now local councils have control. There were 22,000 penalty notices issued in 2004/05, which generated just short of £600,000 in fines. This breaks down to around 70 to 80 penalty charges per day or roughly 10 per Parking Attendant (PA) or about 1½ tickets an hour, per PA. Not an excessive amount.

The Council also collects about £1 million per year from on and off street Pay and Display meters.

- The member for Chigwell said they have a small shopping parade, with a one hour parking restriction in force. The traders say they have never seen any parking attendants, except when the road works were being done. The Parking Manager replied that they had received complaints about over zealous wardens in Chigwell – they do regularly patrol but it seems that when they turn up the cars vanish and reappear again when they have gone.
- Epping Upland were concerned about the over zealousness of wardens that stop people from going into the high street in the evenings. The answer was that if you park on a yellow line out of hours you are not committing an offence. Yellow lines restrictions cease at 6:30pm. Anyway, the Council does not pay their attendants on how many tickets they issue. A parking attendant issues a ticket on a hand held computer and has to take at least three photographs, and the fastest this can be done is about two minutes.
- A member asked what the council was doing about out of hours enforcement in areas in the south of the district where this is a problem? He was told that on three Sundays over the last month and over the bank holiday period they had sent out special patrols, but If the parishes care to tell us where this is a particular problem then we could target those areas.
- The Parking manager was asked how much is collected and how much it costs per month; he replied it was approximately £60k per month. The questioner believed this left just under a £1 million in surplus p.a. The surplus from on street parking went to offset the cost for setting up the system - in the first place the County paid and we are now paying them back, once it is paid back the money will be ring fenced by law, to be spent on Traffic/Highways and Environmental improvements. Any surplus from the off street parking goes to the Council.
- Is there provision to tow away or clamp cars? No we wont be able to do that, as the County did not adopt that part of the legislation.
- How many tickets remain unpaid? We have a payment rate of 70%, so it's quite good compared to London boroughs that only have 40% rate.

d) Planning Sub-Committees

This item was asked for following the move back to the Council Offices in Epping for Area Plans Sub-committees 'C' and 'D' and the effect this move may have on public participation.

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) said that this was a decision made by Councillors and therefore a political decision and not for the officers to defend. In order

for Plans 'C' and 'D' to come back to Epping, full Council had to give their consent to this move, which they did.

It was noted that some of the meeting would still like the Planning Sub-Committees to be based locally if possible, but it was accepted that this was a political decision and beyond the scope of the officers attending this meeting.

5. DISTRICT COUNCIL / PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL CHARTER - REVIEW

The Liaison Committee was asked to consider appointing three representatives to serve on the Working Group. The group appointed:

- Councillor Janet Woods, Loughton TC;
- Councillor E Borton, Nazeing PC; and
- Councillor J Salter, Abbess, Beauchamp & Berners Roding PC

It was noted that the existing charter has a paragraph headed Quality Parish Councils - a separate charter especially for Quality Councils was asked for. This would be a decision for members and not for officers to make.

6. EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN PUBLIC EXAMINATION

The meeting noted the item on the supplementary agenda about the East of England Plan Public Examination – this was not to be a public enquiry but a discussion. The organisers are determined that no more than 25 people per meeting are to be invited. Councillor E Borton (Nazeing PC) is to co-ordinate any comments to go up the next public examination meeting on behalf of the Local Councils.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Ongar Information Centre.

An explanation was asked for the projected closure of the Ongar Information centre. The Joint Chief Executive (Community) explained that no one went into the centre at Ongar and it was therefore not economical to staff it. Officers are now looking at alternative ways to provide this service more efficiently.

b) Heavy goods Vehicle Operators Licences.

A short note was tabled from the North Weald Bassett Parish Council. They wanted clarification on who and how these licences are considered and how Parish and Town Council's views and concerns could be taken into account. The Head of Environmental Services agreed to explore with North Weald PC what was needed and to put a paper with the minutes (attached at Appendix 2) of this meeting explaining what the processes are and how to object. Parishes can come back to the next meeting with any queries.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 2nd November 2005
Wednesday 1st March 2006

CHAIRMAN

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CONTACT LIST FOR HIGHWAYS ISSUES

The contact list is as follows:

Traffic Matters: Spencer Brooks
Vikki Sullivan

Maintenance Issues: Tom Izzard
Dave Lane

Public Rights of Way: Chris Camp

If you want to speak to the Manager of the Epping Team then ask for David Forkin. The Area Manager is Paul Hardy.

The Contact Number is: 01279 642500.

If the issue is of a minor general nature then just ring the office and report the problem (e.g. pot hole) to the receptionist that has taken the call.

Paul Hardy
Area Manager – West Essex
Highways and Transportation
Email: paul.hardy@essexcc.gov.uk

Phone: 01279 642500
Fax: 01279 642600

Write: West Area Office, Warwick House, Roydon Road, Harlow, Essex CM19 5DX

HEAVY GOODS VEHICLE OPERATORS LICENCES

The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) on behalf of the traffic commissioners maintain the Operators Licensing Scheme.

The VOSA Examiners investigate and assesses all new operators' vehicle maintenance arrangements to advise Traffic Commissioners on the issue of operators' licences, as well as interim checks to advise the Traffic Commissioners about existing operators' licensing holders vehicle maintenance arrangements. They also investigate environmental complaints into illegal parking and operation of goods vehicles speeding allegations and tachographic investigation.

The Role of the Traffic Commissioner.

A Traffic Commissioner can curtail, withdraw or suspend Operator licences on the basis of prohibitions, convictions or failure to comply with conditions of holding a licence.

Environmental Factors and Conditions.

When considering environmental matters associated with an application for a licence, or variation to an existing licence, the Traffic Commissioner will take into account:

- The nature and use of any other land in the vicinity of the operating centre, and the effect that granting the application would be likely to have on the environment of that land;
- How much harm would be done to the environment of the land in the vicinity, by granting an application which is materially to change the use of an existing (or previously used) operating centre;
- In the case of land not previously used as an operating centre, any planning permission (or planning application) relating to the operating centre or the land in its vicinity;
- The number, type and size of the authorised vehicles which will use the operating centre;
- The parking arrangements for the authorised vehicles which will use the operating centre;
- The nature and times of use of the operating centre;
- The nature and times of use of the equipment at the operating centre; and,
- How many vehicles would be entering and leaving the operating centre, and how often.

Environmental Conditions.

To prevent or minimise adverse effects on the environment, the Traffic Commissioner may attach conditions to a licence covering:

- The number, type and size of authorised vehicles (including trailers) at the operating centre for maintenance or parking;
- Parking arrangements for the authorised vehicles (including trailers) at the operating centre or in its vicinity;
- The times when the operating centre may be used for maintenance or movement of authorised vehicles; and,
- How authorised vehicles enter and leave the operating centre.

Who can object to an application for a new or major variation?

The following have a right to object to the granting of an application for a licence or variation to a licence:

- A Chief Officer of Police
- A local authority (but not a Parish Council)*
- A planning authority
- The British Association of Removers
- The Freight Transport Association
- The General and Municipal Workers Union
- The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers
- The Road Haulage Association
- The Transport and General Worker's Union
- The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
- The United Road Transport Union

An objection must be in writing and must state the grounds on which it is made. These may relate to the qualities of the applicant and any operating centre he proposes to use. Objections to operating centres may be on environmental or non-environmental grounds, or both. At the same time as the objection is sent to the Traffic Commissioner, a copy must be sent to the applicant. The objection must reach the Traffic Commissioner no later than 21 days after the application is published in the Traffic Commissioner's publication Applications and Decisions, copies of which may be obtained from Traffic Area Offices.

** Parish Councils must make representations to the District Council if they wish to object to a licence. The District Council will then evaluate this objection and decide if they agree with the reasons and if so, will formally pursue this with VOSA. It must be noted that the District Council is under no obligation to automatically pass on any objections received.*

For further detailed information about raising objections against an operator please log on to the VOSA website at - www.vosa.gov.uk